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# THE MESSAGE OF JESUS TO OUR MODERN LIFE. VII

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## AN OUTLINE BIBLE-STUDY COURSE OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

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## PART II. THE PRINCIPLES OF JESUS AS APPLIED TO PROBLEMS OF LIFE

### STUDY VII

#### THE STATE AND POLITICAL LIFE

Jesus is no more a writer upon political science than he is upon political economy. In fact, strictly speaking, he has no political teaching whatever. Yet, paradoxically, the only countries in which there has been marked creative movement in political life have been those in which Christianity has flourished. The reason for this fact, however, is not as simple as the fact itself. There have been many forces working in Europe and America toward the gradual development of constitutional and democratic government, but it cannot be doubted that these changes were in part made possible by the emphasis laid by Christianity upon the worth of the individual and its general tendency to suggest social institutions of an increasingly nobler sort. Our western civilization is certainly far enough from perfection, but, such as it is, it can thank Jesus for its ideals.

The application of the principles of Jesus to politics must be made without any appeal to such specific teachings as were available in the case of the family and wealth. Even more than in either of these instances we are forced to examine the fundamental purpose of his life and words.

#### I. THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN WHICH JESUS LIVED

In many of its aspects the political life of the times of Jesus was more like ours than was the economic life. The century in which he lived saw the rise of

the great system of Roman administration which brought about the transformation of the republic into the empire. The Roman control of Palestine had been brought about by conquest, and Rome had followed its usual practice of leaving much power in the hands of native rulers. To a very high degree the political life and institutions of the Jewish people were maintained notwithstanding their subjection to the new empire. To realize how detached Jesus was from political agitation it will be well to recall the development of the Hebrew state.

*First day.*—§ 102. *The political development of the Hebrew people was similar to that of other eastern nations:* Gen., chap. 49; Num., chap. 26. The stages of this development were briefly, as follows: First, the clan. When we first meet the Hebrew people they were composed of a group of families, each of which developed into a tribe, or clan, bearing the name of its founder. These clans had a loose unity in their belief in their common descent from Jacob, or Israel. Within each clan the government was patriarchal. There was no army, court, judge, taxation, or police force. Strictly speaking, the Hebrew state had not appeared.

*Second day.*—Judg., chaps. 1, 2. Secondly, a loose confederation of the clans under common leadership for the purpose of conquering the land of Canaan. Previously the people had lived together in much the same way as the Bedouin tribes live together today. The exigencies of conquest, however, gave them closer unity but did not bring about governmental unification.

*Third day.*—I Sam., chap. 8; II Sam. 5:1-5; 8:1-8. Thirdly, the nation as a development from this confederation. The need of better leadership in war and of stronger government in peace led to the establishment of a monarchy without formal constitution. There resulted one of those city-states with which ancient history is filled. This city-state fought with its neighbors on the north, east, and south, and for a short time, under the reign of David and Solomon, was prosperous, increasing in wealth and military prestige, and extending its rule as far as Damascus.

*Fourth day.*—I Kings, chap. 12; II Kings 17:1-6; 25:1-21. Fourthly, disruption following the death of Solomon. This was partly due to the refusal of his successor to lessen taxation and quite as likely to the instability of the Hebrew state itself. As a result of the development of the northern tribes there grew up a second city-state, the head of which was Samaria. These two small nations were constantly at war with each other or with the great powers of the North and South. In the course of time both were destroyed and their inhabitants forced into exile in Babylonia.

*Fifth day.*—Fifthly, the Jewish state. This might also be called the Jerusalem state. It was re-established as part of a policy of its conqueror, but was not allowed to be independent. For centuries it was tossed back and forth between Egypt and the northern empires until at last, in the confusion which marked the rule of the successors of Alexander, it was able to re-establish itself, maintaining itself as an independent state, slowly conquering the surrounding cities. Its progress, however, was checked by Rome, and in the time of Jesus its independence had been lost.

*Sixth day.*—§ 103. *Palestine in the time of Jesus was a conquered country prepared for revolt.* Its main political divisions were: (1) the province of Judea, including Samaria, which was under direct Roman control, with Pilate as

procurator; (2) the tetrarchate of Galilee and of Perea under Herod Antipas; (3) the tetrarchate of Herod Philip. Both of these two Herods were sons of Herod the Great. Jesus was the subject of Herod Antipas, whose character can be well portrayed from various references made to him in the Gospels.

*Seventh day.*—Mark 2:13-17. The general condition of the country is well known to us from the writings of Josephus. The Gospels show us many of the same conditions which the Jewish historian describes. The tax-collector, or the publican, was everywhere present, taxing every commodity. These publicans were despised and hated by the Jews, not only because of their occupation, but also because their presence was a perpetual reminder of the national subjection to a foreign power. Read Mark 2:13-17.

*Eighth day.*—Mark 15:1-15. Throughout the century which followed the death of Herod the Great, Palestine was full of political agitation. We read of the rise of revolutionary parties or so-called "robbers," Mark 15:1-15, and of repeated uprisings under the lead of some person claiming divine guidance: Acts 21:38. All of these disturbances were a part of the general messianic unrest and hope. The nation was kept in order for two generations by the Romans, but in 66 A.D. it rose in a revolt which was unsuccessful. It is against this background of political unrest that we must place Jesus.

## II. JESUS WAS NOT A POLITICAL AGITATOR OR LEADER

It would have been very easy for Jesus to organize a revolt against the Romans. Indeed, it was difficult for him to avoid being swept into the political agitation. The fact that he held himself apart from the political unrest of his time serves to emphasize his real purpose and method. He was not one of the long line of religious leaders who have attempted to break political tyranny. He dealt with men's inmost motives rather than with political reform.

*Ninth day.*—§ 104. *The temptation to be a political leader was before him constantly:* Matt. 4:1-11; 16:13-20. Recall his temptation in the wilderness as described by Matthew (Matt. 4:1-11) and the words of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13-20).

*Tenth day.*—Mark 6:30-46; Matt. 21:28-46; John 6:1-15; 18:33-38. Similar temptations must have come to him constantly from his relations with the masses who flocked to him by thousands. The Gospels constantly refer to the crowds who followed him. Read Mark 6:30-46. Just as the people had turned to John the Baptist, who told them of the speedy coming of the Kingdom of God, so did they turn to Jesus as he gave the same message. See Matt. 21:28-46. In one case they became so insistent that he should lead them in revolt that he was forced to leave them and go into the mountains. (John 6:1-15.) To appreciate Jesus thoroughly it is necessary to recall his refusal to yield to this constant pressure. Remember the critical moment in his trial as recorded in John 18:33-38.

*Eleventh day.*—§ 105. *Jesus seems to have given no particular attention to governments:* Luke 14:28-32; Matt. 11:7-9; Luke 7:24-26; Mark 3:24; 14:43-50; 11:40-45. His references to kings are of the most general character as in Luke 14:28-32. They sometimes imply moral contempt for their luxury, as in Matt. 11:7-9 (Luke 7:24-26), or some very obvious fact, as in Mark 3:24. Jesus

seldom refers to God as king. Yet that he was no anarchist or opponent of government as such appears from his words at his arrest, Mark 14:43-50, and his regard for Mosaic sanitary regulations, Mark 1:40-45.

*Twelfth day.*—§ 106. *Yet Jesus was condemned as a political agitator:* Luke 23:1-25 and parallels and John 19:16-22. The reason for this is apparent in the account of his trial. It was only by branding him as a revolutionist that the enemies of Jesus could induce Pilate to condemn him. Could there have been a sadder misrepresentation?

### III. JESUS HAS LEFT US NO EXPLICITLY POLITICAL TEACHING

We cannot believe that this omission in the Gospel records is unfair to Jesus' words and method. On the contrary, the total impression made by his life and character confirms the belief that he moved in a non-political religious atmosphere. How farsighted was the aloofness will appear to all students of history. Christianity as distinguished from many other religions stands committed to no political forms or institutions. Here, as in other cases, the silence of Jesus is among his most valuable bequests to his followers.

*Thirteenth day.*—§ 107. *The sayings of Jesus usually given political content have been misused:* Mark 12:13-17. The most important of these sayings is in Mark 12:13-17, but in this saying Jesus avoided committing himself to an insidious question. If the name on the coin implied ownership, it was to be given to Caesar; if the use of Roman coins implied recognition of Roman right to tax, taxes were to be paid. There is certainly no revolution concealed in this saying; but just as certainly is there no political theory. The real emphasis of Jesus is admittedly on the second injunction in his reply.

*Fourteenth day.*—Luke 22:35-38; John 19:9-11. The other sayings are cited here. None of them, however, carries any definite teaching. The advice to carry a sword is certainly not a call to revolution. It is rather to usual self-protection as contrasted with the exceptional directions given by Jesus previously when sending out the Twelve as his temporary forerunners. His words to Pilate are clearly not intended to be political. The most they can be said to imply is that Jesus saw God's power expressed in government.

### IV. THE APPLICATION OF THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS TO THE SPHERE OF POLITICS

At no point has civilization lagged farther behind the ideals of Jesus than in statecraft. Only there the rule of violence and force still continues. We have attempted to apply his teachings to individual affairs and, although less completely, to social relations within the limits of the nations. But we have never whole-heartedly undertaken to apply them to international relations. The difficulty in so doing is apparent. On the one hand, we cannot appeal to definite rules given by Jesus, and, on the other hand, we must educate public opinion to a sense of Christian duty and fraternity. Here is a new and supremely important field for Christian work. We do not want a union of church and state, but we cannot longer be content to deny political implication to the fundamental teachings of Jesus. To discover some of these implications we must traverse again the fundamental principles considered in Part I of these studies.

*Fifteenth day.*—§ 108. *Jesus teaches reliance on love and not on force. Non-resistance, even to evil men, is preferable to fighting:* Matt. 5:25, 26, 38-41; 6:14, 15; 18:21, 22. Read the passages from Matthew. In this teaching of Jesus there is no attack upon government or police protection, but it is not mere hyperbole. Hatred is worse than suffering injustice. Love will accomplish more permanent results than force. Do you believe this? or do you believe that love must be backed by force? Do you believe that you ought to fight for your rights? Why?

*Sixteenth and seventeenth days.*—§ 109. Matt. 6:14, 15. To appreciate this teaching of Jesus more completely recall his teaching as to *forgiveness* (Matt. 6:14, 15), *reconciliation*, and *brotherhood*. How far can these principles be applied by a government to the care of the poor, the sick, the criminal, etc.? Is it in accordance with the ideals of Jesus to make a criminal suffer pain because he has done wrong? Has the individual any right, according to Jesus, to revenge wrong? Has society? What is the Christian basis of punishment?

*Eighteenth day.*—§ 110. *The opposition of Jesus to the injustice and hypocrisy of his day never involved him in an appeal to force:* Matt. 23:1-37; Mark 1:35-39; 11:15-19; John 2:13-22. Jesus attacked many evils, especially those of respectable people. See Matt. 23:1-37. Non-resistance as practiced by him did not mean passivity or indifference. He saw that spiritual ends could not be reached by physical force, but that spiritual forces alone were competent to accomplish such ends. Thus he thought of messiahship. Note Mark 1:35-39. His cleansing of the temple involved no attack on persons. Read Mark 11:15-19, and John 2:13-22. His loyalty to this faith in the ultimate supremacy of a life of love like that of God, led him to endure the cross rather than resort to even miraculous force (Matt. 26:52-54). The sword he cast into the world was the symbol of division and martyrdom rather than of war. Study Matt. 10:34-39; Luke 12:49-53.

*Nineteenth day.*—§ 111. *Such trust in God and brotherliness argues against the dependence of the church upon the state:* Matt. 10:16-20; John 8:31-45; Luke 12:13-21; Matt. 20:20-28; 23:8-12. True, there is no precise word of Jesus to this effect, and the history of Christianity abounds in attempts to make the state support the church; but the consequences of such action have too frequently been a reliance of the church upon force. Recall the terrible history of religious persecutions. In how many countries today is there complete separation of church and state? Does not the very genius of the teaching of Jesus make the religious life of the individual one of freedom? Read carefully the references given and consider this statement for yourself.

*Twentieth day.*—§ 112. *Yet if the principles of Jesus are to triumph they must be the basis of law and national action.* Does not this conclusion lie in the very nature of our life? If we divorce our individual life from our social relations, how much shall we have left? How can brotherhood exist between all men if nations are opposed to each other as armed antagonists, relying finally upon fear and force? Has a nation the right to adopt principles that make it difficult or impossible for individuals—whether or not its own citizens—to live thoroughly Christian lives?

*Twenty-first day.*—§ 113. *War is essentially a denial of the supremacy of the teaching of Jesus in national affairs:* Luke 19:41-44; Matt. 21:33-45. Can we love our enemies and at the same time prepare to kill them? Jesus wept over

Jerusalem because the city preferred to trust military power rather than him. Read Luke 19:41-44 and compare Matt. 21:33-45. But his principles are far wider-reaching than his specific sayings. Notice how war violates these principles.

*Twenty-second day.*—§ 114. *War violates the principle of the worth of the individual.* An army is an organization in which the worth of an individual is at a minimum. He is ordered to be killed or to kill. How differently members of opposing armies treat each other in moments of truce! Militarism and individualism are enemies. The effect of war upon the individual in its development of hatred, falsehood, violence, and distrust is too well known to need discussion. Can a democracy be militaristic?

*Twenty-third day.*—§ 115. *War substitutes un-Christian patriotism for fraternity.* The Kingdom of God is greater than any country. Can we not have a Christian patriotism in the true sense of both words? Suppose we appropriated even a fraction of the money we spend for our army and navy to helping nations with hospitals, schools, and in other ways; would that be any neglect of defense against war? Will not righteousness and fraternity be as effectual in building friendships among nations as among individuals?

*Twenty-fourth day.*—Matt. 7:20-27. *War substitutes force for love.* That is a flat denial of the supremacy of Jesus. To believe in him implies a confidence in his teaching. Read Matt. 7:20-27. In our modern world are "wars of defense" likely to spring from Christian treatment of other nations? Which is the better exponent of the Christianity of Jesus, a cannon or a missionary?

#### V. THE PRINCIPLES OF JESUS CAN BE EXTENDED TO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE STATE

*Twenty-fifth day.*—§ 116. *The state owes to its citizens education in national ethics.* The state is everywhere engaged in educating its future citizens. Should not this education include moral training? Should not education be extended to immigrants as well as to our American-born children? Should it not show war at its true value and give proper attention to the constructive ideals which have appealed to the noblest patriots?

*Twenty-sixth day.*—§ 117. *The state should protect all citizens from exploitation by selfish, ignorant, and evil men.* Should this extend only to the abolition of evils like the saloon, etc., or also to bad housing, child labor, and similar industrial evils? Consider some specific situation and observe the need of (a) a scientific understanding of conditions and needed reforms, and (b) of the sacrificial spirit of Jesus as a motive to put them into effect. How far can Christian legislation succeed without Christian citizens?

*Twenty-seventh day.*—§ 118. *The spiritual equality between the sexes recognized by Jesus must be carried into law.* Does this involve equality of wages, hours of labor, suffrage? How far have modern states recognized this spiritual equality of sexes? Would this same principle of spiritual equality extend to races?

*Twenty-eighth day.*—§ 119. *The principles of Jesus should be expressed in the care of dependents and criminals.* Should the poor be treated as inferiors or criminals? Is a criminal to be treated as a brother? On what basis can punishment be justified? Should our penal institutions undertake to reform criminals?

At this point will it be advisable to question as to how far retribution expresses the spirit of Jesus. What would be some of the aims of a Christian penalogy?

*Twenty-ninth day.*—§ 120. *The principles of Jesus should be the moral basis of international relations.* We have already discussed war as one aspect of such relations, but the matter is far more extensive. Are treaties to be regarded as of no value beyond a nation's power to enforce them? Are there not such things as national as well as individual justice, gentleness, and mutual trust? Must a nation always suspect another's motives? Can we apply Jesus' teaching as to the mote and the beam to international affairs?

*Thirtieth day.*—§ 121. *The Christian individual is the basis of the Christian state.* A sound ship cannot be built of rotten timbers. The greatest service the church can render the state is to furnish Christian men and women, well grounded in the principles of Jesus and filled with his vicarious spirit, convinced that whatever is injurious is un-Christian, and that whatever is for the good of humanity should be favored at any cost.

After this study of the political life in the light of the teaching of Jesus, do you believe that teaching is practicable? If so, under what conditions? Are you working to bring about a Christian state?

[*The next Study will consider the Christian Community, or the Church.*]